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Foreword

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Foreword

The theme for this volume is “Preaching the Gospel in Canada in the 21st Century.” The contributors for this issue come at the problem from different Canadian perspectives. Two women and three men have given thought to this theme. These men and women have been trained in different fields: two are homiletics, two are systematic theologians, and one is a parish pastor. While two of the contributors are Lutherans, one is Presbyterian, another is Anglican, and still another hails from the United Church of Canada. The goal in this issue is to deal with a central question for Christian proclamation in light of the divergent contexts in which we find ourselves. I hope these articles will give you a deeper appreciation of that diverse reality.

Even with all this diversity, however, it is important to acknowledge that two important underlying factors have helped to form the theme set before you in this issue. This theme has not emerged out of no place in particular.

First, I am myself a homiletics. Of late my field has been moving from a concern with the “shape” or form of Biblical preaching to a wrestling with the *theological* issue of the gospel that animates all preaching. Although Luther himself held to a high view of scripture (*sola scriptura*), he was also convinced that a theological centre for interpreting the scriptures could be found. For Luther, the gospel of justification by grace through faith became a theological norm by which he evaluated all things, including sometimes the scriptures themselves. As such, for Luther, James was the “epistle of straw,” and Revelation was perhaps a bit marginal, insofar as they did not square with his Pauline “centre” of the gospel attested in his study of Romans. Those of us in the field of homiletics have been wrestling with an issue that is at least somewhat analogous: If preaching is not just concerned with developing sermons based on the content and/or form of a Biblical text, but is also a theological task as a whole, just what is *our* theological understanding of the gospel? The homiletical dialogue on this matter is still underway.

A second factor that has influenced the shaping of this issue’s theme is the very public, uniquely Canadian question of identity. More than one of this issue’s contributors remarks on the now classic Beer commercial that proclaims, “I am Canadian.” Something

appears to be afoot, not just in the realms of commerce, but in Canadian culture itself that requires our attention to matters of location and identity. While the question of how we might preach the gospel today is an important one, the place of that proclamation is certainly no less important. As such the theme is really a question: just how do we preach the gospel *in Canada* in the 21st century?

I trust you'll find these different perspectives enlightening and challenging. My hope is that they will inspire you to enter the conversation, too.

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